

## lightning bug

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## lightning bug

by [saintaches](#)

### Summary

If there's one thing being on tour is good for, it's realising he might be just a little in love with his best friend.

Or: Dream is royally fucked.

# Chapter 1

All the air is knocked out of Dream's chest as his back hits the floor. The rest of his limbs follow suit, pinned against the boards by the gravity of sleepless nights and hours spent lying on a cramped bunk in a tour bus.

There's no time to feel the weary pull of sleep. His fingers continue on autopilot, rubbed raw almost to the point of bleeding by the bite of guitar strings. Greasy strands of hair fall in front of his eyes as he turns his head to rest his cheek against the stage. It sticks where it connects. He grimaces at the grittiness of the boards, vibrating due to the sheer amount of *noise* being pumped out by the sound system, and swipes for his mask where it lies abandoned close to his hip.

When he tries to remember how he'd fallen, Dream only manages to dredge up the memory of swirling colours and stage lights bleeding together in a disorientating inkstorm. It's nothing out of the ordinary, anyway. Nobody takes much notice of it, all too used to the sight of him on the floor, fingers flying stubbornly over the frets as though the only thing that'll stop him is death itself.

With the mask repositioned and covering the top half of his face, Dream shoves himself off the floor, limbs already screaming to be sprawled out horizontally again. His lips tip upwards in sadistic amusement. Then he's pulling at the strings again, stinging fingertips and all, stepping up to the mic to holler out the next few bars of a song he can barely remember writing. Lyrics tend to spill out of him in the midst of his nighttime delirium, fever addled mind just coherent enough to convert his rarely unguarded thoughts into words.

If his voice comes out garbled and out of breath from the fall, the crowd don't seem to care, absorbing the energy he effortlessly propels away from the stage as though he hasn't been awake for three days straight.

Despite the sleepy bruises under his eyes (covered by the conveniently positioned white mask), Dream manages to trawl through most of the set without faltering. He's fuelled by the noise from the crowd and stage, so loud he can almost feel his brain rattle against his skull. His earpiece lays characteristically abandoned against his collarbone like an unwanted lifeline, so he can hear every screamed lyric and every reverberating note exactly as they're supposed to sound.

His first mistake comes as he's finishing up one of the penultimate songs. He's run out of lyrics to sing, so the mic stands, solitary, a few metres away at the edge of the stage. The isolated sound of his guitar charges the air around him with dissonance.

As he's tugging out the last few notes, he tilts his head sideways for a split second. It's out of hollow mindlessness more than anything else, the effort required to keep his neck rigid slipping out of his grasp. In doing so, his gaze sweeps directly over George, who's tipping water into his mouth with his head thrown back since he doesn't need to play until the next song begins. The pale skin covering his throat flexes as he swallows, and glittering water droplets cling to his lips, only just visible considering the distance between them. His free hand rests gently on the side of his bass, which looks awkwardly big in comparison to his narrow shoulders. It always has.

Dream isn't sure what happens when his mind short circuits.

It's *George* after all. He looks at his face every day, so often he's certain he must have every line of it committed to his long term memory. Dream's not much of an artist, but somehow he's sure he could recreate the details of George's face with violent pencil lead upon a hauntingly blank page. But in that instance, there's something different about the way the stage lighting captures the curve

of George's cheeks, nose, jaw, setting the planes alight with a golden hue bright enough to rival the setting sun on the horizon.

Something about it has Dream's hands falling away from his guitar a few bars too early to hang absently at his sides, letting the sound fizzle out into a dangerous silence. Except the crowd easily fills the void, covering Dream's abrupt halt. The air rushes out of his lungs in relief.

George caps the water in one smooth motion and glances over at Dream in confusion. His hand is already reaching for the neck of his bass, fluttering over the thick strings as though he was born with it sewn into his grasp. Dream casts his view downwards as if he's been burnt. It's easier to watch the plastic bottle as it sails towards the floor in a clumsy arc and lands on its side by one of the amps. *Far easier*, he thinks as he lifts his gaze back up to meet George's through the mask.

The sudden lump in his throat forces Dream to turn away from the crowd, lest they notice the red pulse of blood blossoming over the exposed sections of his face.

He immediately realises how much of a fucking *awful* idea this is, as he's greeted by the sight of Sapnap's face, looking as though Christmas has come six months early. As soon as he sees Dream looking at him, one of his eyebrows cocks up. His smile is genuinely terrifying, spreading behind the sticks he's got clutched between his teeth. Dream groans under his breath as they stare at each other, unsure how he could've possibly made a lapse in judgement this severe.

*Later* Dream mouths, fiddling with the dials on the body of his guitar to give his fingers something to do. No matter how much he hates acquiescing, it's pointless to avoid the inevitable. Sapnap always seems to know too much for Dream's liking.

Then he's turning towards the crowd again, praying to every deity he knows by name that his neck doesn't look as hot as it feels.

His voice is unnaturally loud as he speaks into the mic, projecting his scriptlike words out over the crowd. He manages to thank them for travelling here before his mind drifts away, floating towards the speaker stack George stands next to on stage left, back perfectly straight and shoelaces coming undone.

"You know, last time we were in Arizona," he says, chest still heaving due to the exertion of performing for an hour and a half straight. An orb of pain is beginning to settle into the middle of his head, extending its branches outwards as his limbs beg for rest. "I gave myself a concussion during the last song, so I'm a little nervous about this one." He laughs, remembering how he'd whacked his head at full velocity against George's bass and woken up to the white ceiling of the ER.

He pushes the mask back up where it's slipping, lips falling free at the bottom. Dream's not overly worried if the crowd sees his face, he's just used to having a certain degree of anonymity. Plus, he thinks it looks cool, regardless of what his friends have to say about it.

"But maybe that's just a sign of a good time," he finishes. His fingers begin to tug out notes, reverberating with enough intensity he can feel it in the soles of his feet. "Let's fucking go!"

Dream swears he can feel George's eyes prickling at the back of his neck and decides he's imagining things. It's to an ageing sky they play the last song, orange and pink returning steadily to dimness as Phoenix fades out of sight and Dream's field of vision fades to the first few rows of the crowd, upturned faces illuminated by the stage lighting. In the early hours of the next day they'll be on the road again, speeding towards another city Dream won't be able to tell apart from the last. But for the people here, each one is special, and so he summons up the last few molecules of

energy he has left and plays for all he's worth.

Sapnap doesn't stop him from collapsing straight into a twelve hour slumber as soon as they've made it back to the bus. He vaguely registers the engine rumbling to life sometime around midnight, but it's not enough to bother him. Tomorrow's problems come with a new city, new faces, new emotions to sort out in the swirling tempest of his mind.

*"Dream."*

Dream can't recall the last time a single word ruined his day, but here he is.

*"Sapnap,"* he parrots, fighting the scowl that's naturally settling on his face. It's early, for them at least. From where Dream is sat by the window, grimy from hours on the road and covered in a thick layer of dust, he can see the California sun reaching its midway point in its arc across the sky. It blazes unbearably against the abyss of blue, unmarred by even the loneliest cloud. Since looking at it for too long makes his eyes sting and a dull ache in his head begin, Dream unfolds the blind down over the dirty pane until the sunbeams only leak in thin streams through the edges.

Sapnap slides into the seat opposite him, fingers automatically drumming at the laminate table with a plasticky resonance. His nails are bitten just like Dream's, the black paint chipping off in an all too familiar way to cling to his cuticles like ashes. "Are we gonna talk about what happened yesterday?" He asks with that same shit eating grin plastered over his face.

Irritation sparks between Dream's lungs as he reaches out to grab at Sapnap's fingers, silencing the erratic tapping sound. The narrow interior of the bus sounds oppressively quiet without it, only the two of them there to occupy the space. Makeshift recording equipment is strewn over the living space, a tangle of wires and snapped guitar strings and stray mics. "I don't know what you're talking about," he says. It sounds like a lie, even to him.

"I think you do," Sapnap presses. "I think you know I'm talking about how looking at George *literally* made you miss the end of the song last night."

"Shut up!" Dream glances behind him towards George's bunk, the curtains pulled blissfully tight in order to create a flimsy barrier between him and them. Knowing George, they still have a few hours before those curtains open and he emerges with his hair sticking up in odd angles, eyes softened by sleep. Shirt stretched enough for the neckline to fall past his collarbones. Irrational though it is, the sight of the bunk closed off to the world prompts Dream to relax a little and his mind to ease as he turns back towards Sapnap. "He's right there, you idiot."

Sapnap rolls his eyes skywards, although the smile doesn't fall from his face. "You know as well as I do he's not coming out of there until at *least* 5," he says.

"It was nothing, anyway." He fiddles with the corner of the blind where the material's become permanently creased, tugging it this way and that just for it to flick back out of shape in stubborn defiance. And it had been nothing, really. He'd looked at George and zoned out, fingers falling off his guitar in pure absent-mindedness. It had been a coincidence, and so what if he'd missed the last few bars of the song? Nobody had even noticed, nobody except-

“You sure seemed worried about him overhearing just now, considering it was ‘nothing’ and all. I’m just saying, doesn’t seem like nothing.”

Dream’s fingers clutch tighter at the edge of the table where his hands have drifted to rest. When he attempts to organise the mess of thoughts bouncing off the echo chamber of his head, his mouth opens uselessly, unable to string a single sentence together. It’s rare that Dream finds himself at a loss for words, but then again, it’s rare for their bassist to render him unable to complete a song. “I don’t know what happened,” he admits, after the silence begins to taper into awkwardness. Dream and Sapnap don’t *do* awkward silences, so it feels all wrong and misshapen on them, as though he’s woken up a few inches taller. He supposes there’s a first time for everything, and the last 24 hours have been overflowing with them.

The bus creaks as Sapnap pulls himself into a standing position. “Acceptance! You’re making progress, at least.” Bubbling water drowns out the distant sound of an unfamiliar band beginning their set as Sapnap grabs cup noodles from the one dedicated foodstuffs cupboard they have. They’re rarely billed to play before early evening, something Dream has become increasingly thankful for every time he steps out of the bus only to be assaulted by the stifling summer heat. Probably for the best, too, or George would be performing in his pyjama top again.

“I’m not going through the seven stages of grief, oh my god.” It’s really not as serious as Sapnap’s making it out to be, is it? Dream pinches the bridge of his nose as though it’ll clear his mind. “Ew, is that your fucking breakfast?” Sapnap sits across from him with the dumb noodles, hands curled around the sides as if it isn’t one hundred degrees outside.

He looks wounded. “It’s almost one,” Sapnap defends.

Dream spins the cup around so the label’s facing him and nearly gags. “I don’t think the time can excuse seafood noodles. Seriously, that’s disgusting.”

“It’s all we had left!”

His stomach pangs with hunger, and suddenly the seafood noodles don’t sound so bad after all. “Gimme that,” is all the warning Sapnap gets before Dream’s leaning over the table, hands grabbing desperately for the cup.

“Hey, it’s *mine*.”

“We can share!” Even with the height advantage, Dream finds himself struggling to take the cup as Sapnap wrestles it away from him.

“Over my dead body we’re sharing,” Sapnap bites. Dream lets go of Sapnap’s wrist, which causes his arm to jerk violently away from him.

They fall silent as the cup flies out of his grip, falling to the floor with a dull thud. The noodles tip out onto the carpet, which would probably be more of a problem if it wasn’t already stained more fluids than Dream really wants to think about. A moment of silence passes as they look at the noodles, pale beige and pathetically limp, a halo of seafood broth spreading out around the sickly mass. “Aw, man,” Sapnap whines. Dream falls back into his seat, head in hands, wondering why he’s abruptly hyper aware of his empty stomach.

Sapnap’s phone breaks the silence and buzzes against the table. He flips it open, fingernails absently trailing over the buttons as he glances at the tiny screen. “It’s George. He says ‘shut up,’” Sapnap tries his best to imitate George’s accent. “Very articulate.”

“You had to text him that?” Dream twists his shoulders so he’s looking at the bunk where George, apparently, lies awake.

“Fuck off,” George says from his bunk, although they barely hear it due to how sleep addled his voice is. Dream can only hope that means he didn't hear the rest of their conversation.

*Too early*, Sapnap mouths. He gets to his feet once more, pulling off his shirt as he traipses towards the back of the bus. Dream can hear him rummaging through the designated junk bunk, pushing bags aside with little care as he searches through the assorted crap filling the empty bed.

“Mind my guitar,” Dream begs, although he suspects it falls on deaf ears.

A bag tumbles out of the bunk just as Sapnap finds what he’s looking for. Dream prays it’s not anything important just as George mumbles, “shut up.”

When Sapnap comes back into Dream’s line of vision, he’s wearing a different shirt, orange this time, notably without the huge toothpaste stain on the front. “Love you too, George! Me and Dream are going to Denny’s now, are you coming?” That explains the outfit change, at least.

The bunk remains silent.

They look at each other without a single ounce of surprise. “Alright, well remember we’re playing at five today, that means you need to be up by half four latest.” Sapnap lowers his voice. “I can’t believe he’s older than us.”

Dream shakes his head fondly. “Let’s just go, I’m starving. If we have to drag him on stage in his pyjamas again, that’s on him.”

“Dude, even the ones with the giant hole in the ass? Harsh.”

They step off the bus into the blistering heat, leaving the fate of spilled noodles to George. To the shock of exactly zero people, they return to the bus later in the same state they left it, soup soaking into the carpet and George’s bunk sealed off from the world. George just about manages to pull on his jeans before the performance, whining the whole time that they didn't wake him up, or some bullshit. Even as George and Sapnap bicker seconds before they go on stage, Dream thinks he wouldn’t have it any other way.

After their set that evening, Dream finds himself staring into the face of another sleepless night, pores burning with smoke and sunlit heat. Irritated energy floods his nerve endings with a white hot itch, scalding and painful. His fingers jitter from playing his guitar the way a corpse moves after death, his feet tap at the floor because he can still feel the reverberating bass drilling at his soles.

It’s a vicious cycle he’s familiar with.

Something about being on tour, stepping out of the bus every morning not entirely certain what the ground he’s landing on is called, unsettles Dream to the core. When anxiety plucks at his thoughts and his limbs buzz with phantom motion sickness each night, it’s next to impossible to sleep, and he’s forced to wait until all his energy reserves are running on fumes to see the other side of the

void. Even when he does, he dreams of travelling, miles and miles flying past them in an uninterrupted haze of road markings and cracked asphalt. White heat often fills his head and claws at his throat until he's coughing, sometimes so hard he's surprised he can't taste blood on his tongue.

He drags a hand over his face. The rough calluses covering his palms scratch like sandpaper at his cheeks, cracked lips unpleasant against even his weathered fingertips. "Fuck," he sighs.

George, sitting across from him, flicks his eyes upwards at the muttered expletive. There's a blanket huddled at his torso, threadbare material dipping up and down to cover the hunch of his narrow shoulders. His collarbones are plainly visible even in the early morning lowlight, with seemingly their only purpose to stick Dream's gaze to the spot. He shakes his head as though it'll send the traitorous line of thought tipping out of his ear.

"You alright?" George's voice is hushed. He's got his legs pulled against his chest, and Dream can see his feet are bare because his toes fall free from the depths of the blanket. There's heat needling at Dream's skin despite the cover of night, so he's not sure how George isn't melting with it covering so much of his skin.

"I wanna sleep," he whines.

The digital clock mounted at the front of the bus announces 02:36 to them, squarish figures apathetic and unseeing. A spiral notepad rests across Dream's thighs, covered in scrawled lyrics and scribbled titles, black ink spinning all of his disconnected thoughts into something more coherent. Tuning pegs bite into his leg, his guitar balancing haphazardly against his slumped form. He doesn't reach for it. Instead, it sits there like a decoration, a silent observer of Dream as he desperately tries to look away from George.

Paper rustles like the fluttering of moth wings as George turns the page of the book he has suspended from one hand. Its spine is so broken Dream's surprised the yellowed pages still cling to it. Immediately, his eyes begin to flick back and forth, falling over the lines in his haste to reach the bottom. Without looking up, he says, "so sleep," as though it's the easiest thing in the world.

"Damn, why didn't I think of that?"

George sticks his thumb into the middle of the book and sets it down so it barely touches the seat. His eyes seem almost black in the darkness. Dream can feel thorns beginning to prick at the soft lining of his throat, pushing outwards and outwards as he looks at George's hands, George's curved jawline, George's softening eyes. *Oh, fuck.* He inhales and it burns. Sometimes, admitting Sapnap was right all along makes him want to curl into a ball and stare at his knees for all eternity.

"Is it worse in your bunk?" George's tone is quiet, measured. Some element of it eases the electricity flooding Dream's blood vessels, as if George's voice is warm water over his back in the shitty cubicle shower.

Dream thinks about the bunk, closed off like a tomb with curtains and a mattress that feels like it would be better suited as a roll mat. Out here, light spills over the pair of them, seeping in through the windows and warding off the oppressive darkness. Out here, George stays up for hours and hours by himself rather than getting a normal sleep schedule, humming under his breath because he doesn't know Dream's lying awake only metres away.

A beat. "Yeah," he says eventually, and the tightness coiled around his chest lessens.

"Then sleep here." George's expression is deadpan.

If Dream didn't know him better, he'd think George is pissed off. But he can see the warmth under the stare, the warmth that's so rarely permitted to come out into the open. It's naked now, reserved for only the moon to observe with gentle eyes. Dream stretches his arms upwards, eyes squeezing shut as the bottom of his t-shirt rides up and blissful cool air collides with his skin. When he untenses, he sees George looking pointedly back down at his book, and decides it's his cue to shut up before he accidentally embarrasses himself.

Soft waves of tiredness pull at him once he's tucked his feet up onto the couch, nose buried into the threadbare material so his head is filled up with the cloying scent of cigarettes and oil. It stings, but not enough to make him move. His eyes burn a little more from the smell, already delicate from hours in the sun and the dusty interior of the bus to deal with. A spring juts into his hip, the cushion filling is lumpy under his cheek, and the length of the couch forces Dream to hold his legs at a strange angle, feet drifting over the edge.

It's far from ideal.

Even with sun-bleached strands of hair falling to obscure his vision, Dream can sense George's steady presence, and it's enough. Soft breathing registers at the back of his mind, George's inhalations noticeably less laboured than Dream's. He's last aware of the turning of sturdy pages and the pulsing of his fragile heart.

"You were right," Dream bites.

Sapnap shrugs. The plastic tip of the spoon he's holding disappears into his ice cream cup, emerges full of soft serve and fruit pieces. "I always am. But what about?"

"I might be a little in love with George."

Sapnap's head snaps up, ice cream forgotten. His eyebrows are raised in legitimate surprise. "I was sort of half joking about that one. We've all zoned out onstage before, I didn't think you were actually, y'know..."

The sunlit parking lot fades from his vision as Dream shoves his face into his hands. They're sat in the shade of the bus, and although the concrete is uncomfortable, the open air is good for putting his thoughts into order, arranging them into neat lines so he can begin to understand them. Dream's been agonising over this all day. He's haunted by how easily he'd fallen asleep in George's presence, haunted by the pressure on his chest loosening. Worst of all, he figures he should've known something about George was different. He doesn't feel his thoughts growing hazy when Sapnap so much as looks at him. "Trust me, I wish I was joking too."

"Why?"

His eyes burn as his hands fall away, narrowly missing the empty ice cream cup. The sun is too bright. Dream sits back against the bus, the metal hot even through his tank, which admittedly doesn't cover all that much of his skin. "Um. Let me think about that one for a second."

"Well, I'm just saying. It's George and Dream, you guys always figure stuff out."

"Yeah, it's George. When has he ever liked anyone?" Dream bumps his head against the side of the



bus like it'll shake his fragmented thoughts into one coherent piece. "Out of everyone, why'd it have to be him? Fucking hell." He thinks about George's mismatched socks with the holes worn into the heels and how stupid his hair looks after he's done sleeping for fifteen consecutive hours. The way he holds things like they're made of blown glass, yellowed books between steepled fingers. His accent, more pronounced in the early hours of morning when he's sleepy. Dream wonders why he notices.

Sapnap's nails scratch against the concrete. "Oh, he has, I'm sure. You really think he'd tell us?" And Dream supposes he has a point. Pretty much everything they know about George is a result of days, weeks of pressing, information only yielded when he grows sick enough of their pestering. It's disconcerting, how easily George reads them in comparison to how closed off he remains. Emotions carefully guarded behind the thick layer of ice spanning over his eyes.

"I can't believe I didn't notice," Dream says. It seems so obvious now, laughable really.

"Please. You always need someone with common sense to notice these things for you. That's why we're bestest friends." Flame flickers at the tip of Sapnap's lighter, wavers as he brings it to his mouth to light up. He looks over his shades, before the silver wheel flips back and the flame is snuffed from existence. Liner is smudged across his eyelids, likely the surviving remnants from yesterday. His posture mirrors Dream's as he leans back against the bus.

Dream initially waves Sapnap off when he offers the cigarette, but as his mind fills to the brim with the thought of George, asleep in one of the narrow bunks, he thinks perhaps it's not such a bad idea. Smoke obscures his line of sight as he exhales, turning the outlines of the tour busses and sparse juniper trees hazy for a brief instant. "I don't know what to do," he whines as he pulls his knees up to his chest. The fresh grazes adorning his knees push through the holes in his jeans, surrounded by tanned skin mottled into scabs and scars.

"Uh, just tell him. The lil fucker's probably been pining after you for the past four years, we'd be none the wiser."

Dream expels all the air in his lungs with one groan of exasperation. "Nah, he would've said something eventually." Right?

The look Sapnap shoots him suggests that no, George would have in fact not said anything. It feels like Dream's fighting an uphill battle here, and he hates losing.

He brushes the dust off his ass when he stands up, legs wobbling as the familiar sensation of pins and needles sets in. It's the kind of dust which sticks itself to places he doesn't even realise exist, coats the ones he does in a powdery orange film. Dream can feel it coating his scalp, wrapping itself in thin layers over his arms, clouding into his nose until everything itches and keeping his head up burns. The bottom of his tank rises when he stretches his arms skywards, attempting to shake free the ache from spending the night squeezed onto the couch.

"You going to confess?" Sapnap's shoulders rise as he takes a slow drag.

Dream laughs and drops his arms. "He's, y'know." He mimes sleeping.

"Wake him up, idiot. It's getting late anyway."

Dream shivers. Waking George early never seems to end well. His nose still stings from the phantom memory of one too many pillows to the face, surprisingly painful when swung at full velocity. The grainy screen of his phone displays mid-afternoon. It's probably best to leave it a few hours, Dream thinks as if he'll be able to get the words out later. Sapnap knows as well as he does

he'll suffer with it until George notices something's wrong and begins to press until he finds out exactly what it is. But still he keeps up his facade.

"Nah, s'okay. I will at some point."

Sapnap throws him a withering glance as he grinds the cigarette into the asphalt. "Just do it before it's too late. For my sanity."

His lips part into a lazy grin. "Only for you, beloved."

They cram into a booth in the corner of a 24 hour diner with plasticky seats, the brown fake leather unpleasantly discoloured. The highway continues to rumble past them, slow moving freight trucks rattling the windows whenever they pass. Outside the diner, the bus remains stationary, halfway between two tour stops.

Dream kicks Sapnap in the shins as they fight for leg room since the tables are so narrow. "I'm literally 6'3, fuck off," he says before Sapnap stomps on his toes. George rolls his eyes and tugs Dream out of the booth, wordlessly switching their places so he can stretch his legs into the aisle. He pointedly ignores the spike of longing he feels when George's cool palms withdraw from his wrist. His fingernails track over the words printed upon the laminated menu in tacky font, an ugly contrast to the yellow background.

They're content to sit in silence for a while, all sleepy smiles and weary eyes. Dream can still hear the ringing in his ears, a constant reminder of how obliterated his hearing is going to become if he continues to remove his earpiece for every single show. It's worth it. He wants to hear every lyric as it's screamed back at him, the words once shamefully tucked away into the back of his notebook burnt onto CDs and learnt religiously by their listeners.

"Hey, cut it out," George says as Sapnap leans forward to steal the cream from the top of his drink.

Sapnap leans back against the seat, wounded. "You let Dream do it," he accuses.

Dream pauses with a spoon full of cream halfway to his mouth. He shrugs, and pops it onto his tongue, artificial vanilla melting almost immediately. George just watches, jaw cradled by one of his hands. There are still headphones slung around his neck with the wire disappearing into his neckline, presumably linked up to his mp3 since tinny music filters out through the speakers.

"Blatant favouritism," Sapnap grumbles. "I'm gonna join Karl's band one day, I swear."

"Nah, you love me too much." George blows bubbles through his straw, eyes crossing as he looks down into the pink sugary god-knows-what of his drink.

"Well, that's a bit far. I'm not Dream."

Dream shifts his legs back under the table so he can kick Sapnap's heel, twice for good measure. It's in times like these he almost wishes he didn't wear converse so he could make it hurt. *Shut up*, he wills. He's supposed to be the one who watches them squabbling, so it's a disconcerting change of pace as George looks between them in confusion. His fingers tap against his glass and his bottom lip is snared between his teeth. "You guys are nimrods."

“Says you.” Sapnap’s face disappears behind his coffee cup. It’s an interesting choice, considering it’s one in the morning and he’s the only one left with anything close to a regular sleep schedule. Even after throwing his all into the evening’s performance, Dream can tell it’s going to be another sleepless night. His stomach turns when he thinks of the road flashing by underneath them.

The laminated menu feels horrid against his temple. “Dream?” One of them asks, voice too far away for him to distinguish who it belongs to.

“I want to *sleep*.” He wants to hold George’s hand. Wait, what?

There are fingers pushing his hair back, cold and nimble against his forehead. “You really don’t like touring, huh.”

“Nooo,” he moans, although it’s not entirely true. Dream loves touring, loves getting their name out there and seeing their fans clamouring at the barrier every night. He tries his best to make eye contact with each one of them, until the stage lights blind him and he can’t make out their faces anymore. But the physical torment of it wears him thin, breaks him down into scattered fragments. Lyrics don’t flow like they should. The stress of creative stagnation makes it even harder. Dream constantly wonders if it’s possible to break the vicious cycle at this point.

“Let’s go back to the bus,” George says, voice pitched down, honey toned. His face must be close, because his breath ghosts over Dream’s neck. “I have an idea.”

Dream can stare from the safe darkness of his bunk at George’s side profile as he reads. The curtains are pushed open, but Dream doesn’t find the gentle light to be a problem. George sits next to his bunk, book pressed into his hands, so close Dream could read along with him if he wanted to. He doesn’t want to. Instead, he takes in the bend of George’s neck, wondering what it would be like to press his lips against the plane of skin stretched there.

But thoughts like that are dangerous. Dream turns over and stares at the wall before he can do something stupid like reach out and brush his fingers over the ridges of George’s spine.

Dream thinks he must be hallucinating. There’s no other way to explain the sight that greets him once he steps back into the bus, hair damp due to the gas station shower he’d managed to scout out. As much as he’d love to say he’s pulling the sexy wet hair look, the California sun has ensured it’s nearly dried to completion. Which, coincidentally, might also explain the mirage the heat is conjuring in front of him.

“Am I *dreaming* right now?”

Sapnap bumps shoulders with him as he walks past, hair tucked up into a hat to presumably hide how long he’s gone without washing it. His bandana rests around his neck instead. “I know, I almost passed out. Hey, pinch me.”

Dream pinches his arm perhaps a little harder than necessary, if the pained noise he emits is

anything to go by.

“Are you guys gonna quit the theatrics?” George asks, arms folded delicately over his chest. His legs are crossed in front of him and his back is held surprisingly straight, considering how many hours he spends curled over his DS. He looks out of place in the calamity of the tour bus, especially since Dream isn’t used to seeing him among the mess with the sunlight to illuminate the scene.

“But you’re fully clothed-”

Sapnap cuts him off — “and your makeup’s done-”

“And it’s not even 2 p.m.,” Dream finishes. George could’ve slept until 6 today without giving Sapnap a stress aneurysm, considering their set isn’t scheduled until 7. Yet here he is, eyes alert and bright. “Are you feeling okay?”

George huffs as he stands, goggles knocked from his lap onto the couch by the motion. “Well, if you want me to go back to bed so bad...”

“No!” Dream wraps his arms around George’s waist as he beelines for his bed, utilising every one of his reflexes in order to intercept him. “Georgeeee, don’t leave us.”

Sapnap raises an eyebrow so the stud pushed through it glints wickedly in the sunlight, but mercifully doesn’t comment on their questionable predicament. “If you sleep now I’m gonna piss in all your shoes.”

That makes George go limp, and he stops trying to squirm his way out of Dream’s arms. “Not the shoes,” he says. Dream can’t see his expression, but he imagines it’s terribly overdramatic. Sapnap threatens similar bullshit during every squabble they have, but so far he hasn’t actually gone through with any of it.

“The shoes.”

“I was gonna stay up anyway,” George grumbles. He taps at Dream’s forearms. “Lemme go.”

Dream starts and draws away, already missing the way George’s back had pressed up against his chest, solid and real. George looks different under the sun, daylight embracing his cheekbones and jawline in a way the buzzing electric lights can’t replicate. His complexion is startlingly pallid, somehow untouched by the June weather even though they’ve been on the road for weeks already. By comparison, Dream is covered in tan lines, be it from his clothes, his mask, his fingerless gloves. “Right,” he mumbles, picking at a hangnail so he has something to do with his vacant hands.

“Stop that,” and George’s hands are covering his own, cool where their skin meets. It takes Dream’s mind a minute to catch up, to realise they’re basically standing in the middle of the bus holding hands while Sapnap attempts to make eye contact with him.

His gaze drags over their hands, over the matching calluses and stark tone difference. George has a plaster wrapped around the base of his thumb because he’d sliced it open on someone else’s tuning peg while fucking around after their set — probably Karl’s. For someone who seems to spend the majority of daytime sleeping, George has a surprising amount of friends in the other bands on the road with them. “You should paint your nails,” he says in a rush once he realises he’s been staring at George’s hands in silence for the past few moments.

“I’m too lazy.”

“Ain’t that the truth,” Sapnap says, reminding them of his presence. He sits by the window, arm pressed up against the glass so he can watch other bands mill around the parking lot, presumably waiting for their performances. His hand comes up to wave at someone Dream can’t see before he’s turning back to them. “Dream will do it for you.”

He thinks about what that entails, and almost says *no, absolutely he will not do it*, but George is looking at him with an expression full of hope. “You will?”

Fuck it. “Sure, why not.”

Which is how they end up sitting on opposite sides of the table, George’s hands flat against the plastic laminate coating. Sun spills over the two of them, silhouetting their bowed forms with a nimbus of light. There are staff outside, dragging wheeled carts with tired arms and backstage passes slung around their necks, but Dream and George remain cut off behind the glass. Sapnap is absent for once, having mumbled something barely coherent about finding the showers before darting from the bus. The AC provides enough white noise to fill the comfortable silence, rattling every now and then because it must be at least two decades old.

Black paint coats George’s nails and leaks into his cuticles when Dream forgets to remove the excess from the brush. Considering the sheer amount of black nail polish he and Sapnap go through together, he’d think he’d be better at it, but George still ends up with patchy coats and black smudges at the end of his fingertips. His wrist curves delicately as he blows on the wet top coat, lips pursed into a soft O shape.

“That doesn’t make them dry faster, you know.”

George’s hand drops slowly back to the table. His phone rests next to them, the screen mounted upon the flip top displaying 15:34. They have hours to waste before they need to leave the bus, and the heat is beginning to prickle at Dream’s eyes as the AC struggles to regulate the air temperature. He swears they’ve been stuck in California for months when in reality it’s only been a few days. He’s already sick of it. “I’m tired of this state.”

“How is it different to any of the others? We’re gonna be doing the same shit every day until mid August anyway.”

George and his logic. Dream flops back against the aged couch, kicking his legs up to rest on the table in one fluid motion. His feet are bare, which makes George wrinkle his nose in disgust.

“Come on now. Don’t pretend like you don’t care.”

“I don’t.”

“Only because you sleep too much to take much notice of where the fuck we are.”

They manage to glare at each other for a grand total of two seconds before dissolving into quiet laughter. Maybe they give George too much shit for his whack sleep schedule, but it’s become Dream’s favourite running gag. And if they didn’t, it would only be something else. Like the time he pissed the b-

“How’s your writing going?”

Dream glances over to his notepad, the tatty cover firmly closed to obscure the curling pages. A biro is stuck into the loops at the top, and ink bleeds out through the point to leave marks on the table. There’s a fly making its way over the cover, legs moving sluggishly through the thick wall

of heat. Guilt wells up in his chest even though he tries his best to shove it down, crumple it out of existence. “It’s been better,” he admits. He ends up writing most of their lyrics, just because he doesn’t have any problem with spreading the contents of his heart out in the open, vulnerable. They can figure out ways in which to mould them into songs together, over 4 a.m coffees and under dim streetlamps back in Florida.

“I wrote something,” George says in a rush, and Dream’s eyes widen in surprise. He knows the majority of what George writes stays hidden away at the back of his laptop, to be seen by his eyes only. The amount of lines that have actually made it onto their recordings must be in single figures, bracketed by an overflow of Dream’s conjectures.

He pretends to be nonchalant about it so as not to make it into a big deal. “Oh yeah?”

“I was wondering um,” George fumbles for words. “I was wondering if you could look at it for me.”

Dream’s throat squeezes tight because George trusts him with this, trusts him to look at his thoughts converted into harsh black letters. “Yeah, yeah of course,” he says, vaguely hoping his eyes haven’t gone too soft.

He’s quiet as George rummages in his bunk for the laptop, eventually pulling it out from under the sheets with some difficulty due to his tacky nails. Dream is hit with the image of George sitting upright in his bunk, curtains closed, fingers tapping away at the keyboard into the early hours of the morning. Inspiration tends to strike him in the middle of the night too, so he’s forced to wonder if George only stays up as late as he does because that’s when it’s easiest, or simply because he prefers the lonely company of the night.

George plonks himself back down next to Dream this time so their knees bump together, arms touching. The laptop hums to life as the fans immediately go into overdrive, and it lags at least three times just as George attempts to put in his password. Dream knows it’s his and Sapnap’s birthdays put together, but George doesn’t need to be made aware of that. Finally, the blue wallpaper casting a ghostly veil over George’s face just because it’s the colour he can see best.

“Man, this thing must be on its last legs,” Dream comments as the screen flickers for a split second. A window pops up unprompted, but George’s face is a display of patience as he drags the cursor over to close it.

His fingers rest on the keys. There are at least three keycaps missing, but Dream finds himself mildly shocked there’s not more lost to the void of George’s bed. “It has sentimental value,” George says.

Then he’s clicking through his files as Dream wiggles the trackpoint around, sending the cursor flying off in random directions. “Stop,” George laughs, grabbing Dream’s hands so he can push them away from the keyboard. The file takes a while to load once he finds it, but then again, everything takes a while to load when it comes to George’s laptop. “Here.” He slides the laptop over to Dream, lip stuck between his teeth like it is when he’s nervous.

Dream begins to read, and his heart sinks like an anchor on a trajectory to the very depths of the ocean. His eyes track over the lines with self destructive curiosity, fingers masochistically scrolling down the doc. When he’s done, he sits back, summoning a smile to spread across his face even though there’s poison ivy encasing his chest cavity and weaving between his brittle ribs.

“Is it okay?”

Dream looks down so he doesn't have to make eye contact with George. "It's better than okay, George. You should write more," he says, even though it pains him. He's not stupid, George's lyrics aren't the kind of mindless scrawl that could've been written by anyone, fiction made to sound half plausible. This time, they're written by someone in love, and it makes Dream's stomach drop as he realises he's too late. "Who were you thinking about when you wrote this?" Dream asks, just to twist the knife a little more. His elbow teasingly finds George's side to cover his downcast haze of emotion.

"Doesn't matter," George says and wow, it's definitely not the right time to marvel at how the peach coloured blush looks upon his cheeks.

He's too late. *Doesn't matter*, George's voice echoes in his head, taunting him. But George is right, it doesn't matter, because they're both adults and best friends and Dream isn't going to ruin this for George just because he wants something he can't have. It's been silent for too long, the air between them buzzing with the weight of unsaid words.

Dream clears his throat. "You sure you want these released?" Usually George prefers to keep things like this hidden away, folders in folders so nobody can see this part of him.

"Yes," he startles Dream with the certainty in which he says it.

The sickest part of this is how Dream's going to be the one who has to sing them, throwing George's thoughts out into endless microphones as he struggles to keep two hands on his own. But he wants to, wants to do this for George and perform his song one day. It takes barely any effort to acquiesce. "Okay, I guess we should show Sapnap-"

"Show me what?"

Dream nearly cries with relief at the sound of his best friend's voice as Sapnap appears in front of him, dark hair wet against his forehead. Everything seems less intense when he's here, charged atmosphere melting right back into normality. "George wrote lyrics," he says, cursing himself as his voice comes out gritty. He stares at Sapnap, trying desperately to communicate in the unnerving non verbal way they've perfected over a solid decade of knowing each other. *It's bad.*

*Oh really?* Sapnap pulls the laptop towards him, sitting down opposite them. He's still hyper aware of George's proximity, the way their shoulders knock together every time one of them moves. His fingers fiddle incessantly with the pull cord for the blind, weaving it under and over his thumbs, dragging his nails over the metal components. While George briefly glances at it, Sapnap's gaze is focused with needle precision on the laptop, flickering back and forth so fast Dream wonders if he'll pick up on the looming undertone of it all.

His eyes flick up to meet Dream's over the top of the screen, softening into something like sympathy. Dream expects him to tease George about it, perhaps ask who it's about, but he just hums under his breath. "This is good. You *should* write more."

George looks awkwardly down at the table, black nails tracing the countless marks and dents pressed into it. "I'm not inspired so often," he says. "I uh, I have tabs for this already and it's like, sketchy, but I can send them to you," he looks at Dream and smiles, oblivious to the white noise buzzing around his brain.

Dream wonders how many hours George has spent on this, fucking around on Dream's guitar when him and Sapnap are passed out. "Y-yeah, send 'em over. I'll check later, after we're done." He prays his smile looks normal enough.

The sound of keys tapping grates his nerves. When George finally shuts the lid, Dream exhales, feeling the bonds encasing his chest loosen slightly. He's only distantly aware of George and Sapnap getting up as they leave. The bus returns back to normal soon enough, the three of them each finding their own ways to waste their time until the evening, when they need to be alert and switched on. Dream's just so happens to be tracking the sun's trajectory today. His eyes burn, but he chalks it up to the blazing intensity of the light and nothing else.

He likes the song.

His notepad lies forgotten on one of the countertops, dejected pages fluttering when a stray draft blows through the living area. It's late and his fingertips are starting to kill like they do right before the skin tears open, but Dream doesn't have it in him to rummage through the cupboard for the box of plasters. Only the glow of his screen illuminates his face. George hums under his breath, the top of his head barely visible over the table since he's sprawled out on his stomach. Dream wonders if he's thinking about *them*.

He rubs a hand harshly over his face. When he returns to hurrying through the chords, he begins to trip over himself and his fingers don't cooperate with his mind, pressing over the wrong frets until he's left with an auditory calamity. George's eyes appear curiously over the edge of the table as the dissonance fades away into nothing. Tinny music bursts out of DS as his character dies, forcing him to loosen his fingers around the device until it falls from his hands.

"Just tired," Dream says by way of explanation, resting his elbows atop the guitar.

"You like the song though?" George has a deathwish for Dream, he swears. His voice sounds so hopeful, eyebrows pushed together with concern.

He pokes at the inside of his cheek with his tongue. How is he supposed to tell George that every note he plays of the damn song burns him? His fingers press over the double crossed notes of their own accord, already working their way into his muscle memory. When he pulls his hands away, he sees red beading at the end of his pointer finger, skin finally worn too far. "Of course I like it. You wrote it."

*And that's the problem.*



## Chapter 2

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream remembers the first time he met George surprisingly well. It's like he knew the guy was gonna be important all along, and made sure to pay attention to the plethora of tiny details nobody else would think to notice.

He remembers how George looked when he showed up to his garage back in Florida, which housed a very flea infected sofa and a few week's worth of empty takeaway containers. They weren't allowed to play anything in the house, so Dream's parents had banished them to the garage, a decision they ended up soon regretting. Sapnap had taken to plastering his cup noodle lids to the wall, so mosaic-like strips of aluminium covered a good portion of the flaking cinder blocks. Dream wasn't sure which was worse. Sapnap had insistently called it modern art. Besides, it was behind his drum kit, and Dream wasn't going to be the one to purge him of his creative backdrop, or whatever the fuck he referred to it as.

"You're too late," Sapnap said. They'd spent the last two hours listening to mediocre bass playing at best, cataclysmic at worst. Most of the guys who'd shown up seemed to tip towards the latter end of the scale, so their nerves were wearing alarmingly thin as the clock ticked closer and closer to midnight. His feet were kicked over the side of the flea-couch, head resting heavily on Dream's shoulder. A can of artificially flavoured cherry god-knows-what was set on the scrubbed concrete beside him, rattling every now and again whenever a draft blew through the open garage door.

Dream had looked George up and down, from the navy sweater that fell to his mid thigh and over his palms, to the shoelaces falling out of their knots, to the bass slung across his shoulders. It dwarfed him, which amused Dream for some reason. Whatever it was, it gave him the incentive to hear George out. "Nah, let him play. Nobody else has been any good."

"Chronic understatement," Sapnap muttered under his breath.

"Please let me play, I already walked all the way here," George said as his fingers fiddled with the end of his sleeves. His shoes scuffed along the floor, narrowly avoiding a plastic takeout lid. He looked out of place among the piles of assorted trash, his clothes too unstained and his hair cut too neat.

"Woah, where are you from?" Sapnap sat up in interest.

George had smiled to himself, cheeks gathering up to accommodate for it. "The UK. I can't go five dumb minutes without being asked that, I swear. I've been here months and it just never ends."

Sapnap shrugged, easily won over as per usual. "I guess you can play. But if you want in, don't make a habit of being late," he grumbled. (The irony isn't lost on Dream.)

Weirdly enough, Dream's memory seems to short circuit when he tries to recall George actually playing to them, only delivering the thin band on his pointer finger, and the hair that had stuck up at the back of his head. The light reflecting off the glossy surface of his bass. There was a wire trailing haphazardly around his feet, reaching up to connect the bass to the amp next to where Dream was sitting. It must've been good though, or he wouldn't be on tour with them to cause Dream unreasonable amounts of heartache.

“You’re in,” Sapnap had said before George was even done putting the bass back in its case. His fingers trailed over the zipper before letting it swing loose.

He turned to face them with dark eyes reflecting the sickly fluorescent lighting strips, suddenly reminiscent of glow sticks instead of uranium rods. His eyebrows were quirked up. “You’re not even gonna like, discuss it?”

“Oh, we already did,” Dream supplied. “We’ve been friends for a long time, you’d be surprised. Silent conversations, you know.”

George looked like he really didn't know. He blinked slowly. “Okay...”

“You’ll get used to it,” Sapnap waved him off. “You want a cig?” The true sign of a blooming friendship, by Sapnap’s standards.

There was a beat before George’s lips began to tilt up, the first time Dream saw him smile properly. “Sure, I’ve got literally all night.”

Perhaps it should’ve been disconcerting, how little time it took George to worm his way into their dynamic. Perhaps Dream should’ve known, when Sapnap didn't give a single shit about what George was wearing, or the tiny ring on his pointer finger, or the sweater which was much too long for his torso. Perhaps it should’ve set off alarm bells in his head or something, *anything*, but now it’s too late.

Dream thinks he’s never, ever going to see the day he gets tired of gas station showers.

Sure, it means he has to rush through everything so the bus isn’t kept waiting for too long, but he’d take the compromise any day over the dreaded communal showers often characteristic of the onsite sports complexes. Dream’s a confident guy, but that’s pushing it.

He watches with grim fascination as a spider crawls over the opposite wall. It makes its way across the cracks in the tiles, legs flailing now and again when it struggles to grip to the ceramic. Bubbles swirl around his feet, cascading in lazy spirals towards the plughole. Dream stares down into its murky depths, wondering whether he particularly wants to know what might be living in the pipes here. Pale yellow ebbs over his skin, the overhead light bouncing slowly from the lemon coloured walls. Darkness presses against the narrow frosted glass window. It doesn’t prompt Dream to move faster as it usually would, the hot water doing wonders for his knotted muscles and rigid joints.

Dream reaches for the soap, fingers slipping around it as he straightens back up. He freezes when he looks at the label, the container held inches away from his face as he looks at it in horror.

In his tiredness, he must’ve grabbed the wrong bottle. What sits in his hand is George’s dumb strawberry scented shit he buys because he refuses to use ‘man lotion’, or whatever the fuck he calls it. Dream tentatively uncaps the thing and lifts it to his nose. Sure enough, it smells just like George, artificially saccharine yet somehow comforting.

Dream stands there for a second, before shrugging and squirting some into his open palm. There’s no way in hell he’s going back onto the bus now just to swap soap bottles. He thinks if the driver hasn’t already amassed enough reasons to hate him, that might just end up being the final straw.

It doesn’t take a genius to see why using his soap could be a shambolic idea, as Dream rubs it into

his aching muscles and attempts to ignore the way it makes his skin smell of George. He chews at his bottom lip until it's red and raw, familiar images of George's oversized hoodies, George's dumb goggles, George's spare bass strings shoving themselves to the forefront of his mind. Perhaps it would've been better to let the dried perspiration stick to his skin after all.

"Fuck!" The porcelain tile smarts against his fist as Dream bangs it into the wall.

Hysteria begins to bubble in his chest as he tries to force George the fuck out of his mind, but he might as well be branded on the inside of Dream's eyelids. He knows because he squeezes his eyes shut in frustration, surrounded by strawberry and vanilla which liquifies his thoughts into cloying sludge. The water running hot over his face disguises the tears as they spring from his eyes without permission. Dream is so tired. His thoughts are pulled this way and that like rocks across a seabed, clunking together with dim resonance until the waves haunt him and flood his cheeks with brine and salt.

He grabs his conditioner with shaking hands, rubbing it over his skin just to get rid of the smell. It's a waste, but he scrubs with vigour until his heart begins to slow and a poor imitation of citrus clogs his sinuses.

His hair sticks to the tile as he leans his forehead against it, blowing out even breaths and counting the seconds between every exhale. Yellow floods his vision. It doesn't do anything to dilute the sea fog cast over his mind, and he remains bowed under the weight of it. The spider skitters uncomfortably close to his toes as his tears are dispersed into nothing, washed away into the pipes along with broken hopes and dreams just like his he'll never know the stories behind.

Tonight feels vaguely reminiscent of the first time the three of them met, inhaling second hand smoke as the moon slips towards its apex in the sky. Only this time, Dream's not staining the walls of his parent's garage, but sitting atop the tour bus, heels swinging back and forth to kick against the windows at periodic intervals. Sappnap stands at the front of the vehicle, arms crossed over his chest as he watches the staff dismantle the stages in the near distance. He doesn't look at George for long, the projected nebulas on his cheeks as he stares up at the stars just a little too much to bear.

Dream wonders how many health and safety guidelines they're breaking. He's honestly surprised their manager hasn't shown up to put an end to this, citing something about the bus deposit. As if they hadn't lost it on the first day when George had dropped an amp on the floor and left a noticeable dent in the laminate. Or when they'd crammed enough shit into the spare bunk it's started to bend under the weight. Or the cup noodle stain blatantly in the middle of the carpeted area. Yeah, it's far too late for the deposit.

The roof creaks as George rolls onto his stomach instead, shirt riding up to expose inches of skin which look paler in the moonlight. His neckline is so stretched it falls off one shoulder, revealing faint bruises from the weight of his guitar because he's not used to playing so much yet. It's still early in the tour. Dream wrinkles his nose as George blows smoke directly into his face, throat tightening until he has to lean over and cough into his fist.

"Go sit with Sappnap if you're gonna do that," he says, gripping onto the side of the bus so he doesn't tip headlong over the edge. It's not as though the drop is particularly dangerous, but he could do without the sprained ankles. The asphalt stretches out in front of them as if to taunt him, jagged lines webbing over it where it's cracked under the heat. He can see people darting between

busses, games consoles blaring with noise, beer bottles clinking together. But the three of them are content enough to sit up here with only each other for company. "Think of my poor vocal cords."

George shrugs. "You dealt with it for a solid year in that shitty garage."

"God, why'd you have to remind me of that place?" The roof squeaks again as Sapnap sits next to them. His ashes land a little too close for comfort to Dream's splayed fingers, and he levels a glare at him.

"I thought you liked it."

"I did," Sapnap whines. "But now I'm all sad and shit. That place had so many memories, dude. Do you think I should start another gum wall in the bus?"

"No," Dream and George say.

Sapnap exhales in a gust of smoke which reliably drifts towards Dream, poking at his sinuses until they sting. "You two are gross," he says, burying his nose in the crook of his elbow so all he can smell is a whisper of fabric softener overpowered by layers of dried perspiration. The heat here is unbearable during the day, but it's not so bad in the evenings when the sun's dipped past the horizon and Dream can finally breathe without his eyes stinging.

"Don't sit in the direction of the wind then, genius."

He pulls his knees up to his chest so they're no longer dangling precariously over the side of the bus. "I'm proving a point. And think how much money you'll lose if my voice gets all fucked up."

"I'm gonna miss this," he muses after the silence turns stale and all they can hear is the stage being pulled apart, packed away into the back of a truck only to be put back together again in a new location early tomorrow morning. Iron ribs are stacked together, put at rest and rattling together like wishing bones. "When we can tour by ourselves and sleep in real beds instead of in a bus." In his periphery he sees Sapnap swipe George's cigarette as his own fizzles out into nothing. Perhaps George would put up more of a fight if he weren't so tired, a result of nights spent awake with Dream's acoustic guitar cradled in his lap. Instead, Dream watches with amusement despite himself as George's arm flops in defeat onto the metal roof. Sapnap crows, victorious.

"Well. We need a new album for that to happen," Sapnap says.

A groan escapes him, carrying with it all the weary energy accumulating in the pits of his lungs. "I'm working on it, promise. Plus, we have George's song pretty much ready to go." *Fucking brilliant.* It's all too easy to press his back against the metal surface of the roof and stare up at the stars, looking for connections which aren't there, lines which might arrange themselves into orderly answers for Dream. Maybe if he looks carefully enough, he'll see a meteor falling over the dark abyss, rainbowlight trailing behind it.

Clouds drift across the sky until the dim starlight is obscured, mocking him. His fingers clench into a fist.

"Why don't *you* write something," George says, nudging Sapnap with his foot. There's a hole worn into the heel of his sock, and Dream has no idea where his shoes have gone.

Sapnap's eyebrow bar glints. "Please, I could never be as angsty as you two. What do you want me to write about, always being the one to talk some fucking sense into Dream?" He seems to consider his own words and caves, hands covering his face in horror. "Oh god, I need a pay rise, it's so bad."

“Why, what is it this time?”

Panic spikes in his chest. Sapnap’s an awful liar, no matter how easily George goes along with what they tell him. Although Dream suspects more than often he sees straight through them, content to play along while amassing everything in his head. Calculating. A chill ghosts along his spine, prying the hairs on his arms up from their flat position.

“Um-”

Dream decides to put an end to that one before he regrets it. “Nothing, he’s being a bitch again.”

*Please don’t press*, he wills, craning his neck so he can see George’s eyes, deceitfully blank. There’s a terrifying moment in which he thinks he can see something spark, a glint of an insight into George’s closed mind. It’s gone as soon as he blinks.

With almost comedic timing, the sound of their manager’s voice drifts up towards them. Dream finds himself slumping with relief, subject averted for now. “Get off the fucking roof, we’re leaving soon.” The command is punctuated by the door slamming so hard the windows rattle.

Dream, Sapnap and George exchange looks like kids caught with their hands in the cookie jar. Still, none of them move until the bus rumbles to life, the sound of the engine forcing them to scramble to their feet and clamber off the roof. The cigarette is crushed under the sole of Sapnap’s high tops since George isn’t wearing shoes, ash tarring the paint to blend in with the unsightly collection of bird shit.

There’s no time to carefully pick his way back down to the ground, so Dream is forced to hold on tight to the edge of the bus and lower himself until he’s low enough to jump. He winces as he hits the asphalt too hard, soles of his feet stinging, but then they’re pushing past each other to fling the doors open before the bus pulls away without them. Perhaps they’d be more relaxed if Dream and Sapnap hadn’t been left at gas stations too many times for comfort.

The driver stares at them, unimpressed, and kills the engine. They’ve been tricked.

“You have an hour, *please* stay on the bus,” their manager says, eyes flicking up over the tour schedule he’s reading. Honestly, Dream feels a little bad.

The bus is a minefield to navigate when everything’s packed into it, equipment pushed tetris style against the couches with only a narrow strip of flooring visible beneath it all. Dream casts his eyes over the claustrophobic interior and his heart sinks, even as Sapnap picks his way through it and disappears into his bunk. “An hour?” He pins an innocent smile onto his face. He feels bad, but not *this* bad.

“An hour and the bus is leaving regardless of whether or not you’re on it. You can walk to Long Beach for all I care.”

“Got it,” Dream winces.

He’s reminded of being stranded in roadside gas stations, phone extended into the air as he desperately tries to pick up signal. George seems to escape these situations, as it’s common knowledge he’s rarely asleep during travel times. Must be nice, Dream thinks.

George glances between him and the packed bus for about two seconds before they’re both darting towards the doors, emptying onto the parking lot as their manager sighs in defeat. The night tastes so much better when they’re not supposed to be out here. George’s eyes glitter mischievously.

And despite the threat of the forty hour walk to occupy their rest day, Dream and George barely make it back onto the bus an hour later, chests heaving and laughter spilling out of them every time they retain enough breath to do so. Shared secrets left unspoken.

Things haven't always been this easy.

Dream remembers the period of time after they'd been kicked out of his parent's garage and before they'd been signed to a label, the threat of disbandment looming over their heads as they struggled to pull the cash together to make it work. He'd slept on George's couch for weeks on end, forcing them to step on each other's heels until the tension had risen beyond what was bearable. Until they were arguing every day. Even when Sapnap was over the storm clouds seemed to bubble with unbridled ferocity, pressing against the windows as they each secretly wondered if this dream of theirs was even feasible. Ash covered the table, bottle caps filled the gaps between the sofa cushions.

He's not sure at what point it went too far, their words turning sharper than they'd ever dared. All Dream remembers is George, standing in the middle of the kitchen, arms wrapped around himself, eyes red. The apartment door rattled when it slammed. Even though they were fighting, pulling George's hoodie over his head made Dream feel a little better, like he wasn't alone in someone else's apartment with wet cheeks and a glass bottle pressed to his forehead, condensation tracked across his skin.

The next thing he remembers is hands wrapped around his shoulders, pulling him upright. All his limbs felt as though they'd been put on wrong, stiff and unyielding on their pivots. He could still feel the imprint of the carpet on his cheek. George tugged him over to his bed, which was more a mattress on the floor, really.

"Sleep here," he said, eyes soft despite everything. His fingers clasped the neck of the empty bottle, half its contents seeping into the threadbare carpet.

Dream didn't even have the heart to fight him on it. The mattress was criminal after so long contorting his limbs to fit onto the couch, and he stretched his legs out, shoving his face into a pillow which smelt like George's detergent. "George."

The light from the kitchen shifted upon George's form as he turned. Veins still webbed over his eyes like cracked earth, dry and brittle. "Yes?"

Weeks of blistering drought are always followed by the monsoon. "Come here."

George was uncertain as he lay next to Dream, shoulders pressed together, sticky from the heat. Erratic lines ran across the ceiling. The plaster was flaking, white chips of it dotted over the carpet like snow. Only the light spilling from the kitchen illuminated them, washing everything with an unsightly yellow glow. Dream could hear the constant roll of traffic outside, its steady cadence something to latch onto so his mind didn't drift away to dangerous places.

The sheets rustled as George turned his head. "Dream?" His voice had lost its thorny edges. It sounded familiar again, Dream realised as his heart sung with the kind of ache that comes with

sinuous healing.

“I’m sorry.”

A moment passed before George’s weight was pressing Dream down into the mattress, his head resting solidly upon his chest. He hummed, and Dream could feel the vibration all the way down to his bones. “I’m sorry, too. Let’s never do that again,” George said.

“We won’t.” And somehow, with George falling asleep on him, Dream knew things might just get better.

Dream isn’t sure why he’d assumed every tour bus is as chaotic and cluttered as theirs.

He’s sitting across from Karl on his band’s bus, the seats surprisingly clean and stain free. The cushions aren’t greying from a buildup of excess dust and smoke, and the rugs don’t have suspicious marks scattered across them. Sure, there’s the occasional t-shirt flung over the back of the seats, or crumpled on the floor, but it’s nothing compared to what he’s used to. There’s even an air freshener stuck into one of the sockets. How novel. Dream isn’t sure where the other half of the band has gone, with only Alex and Karl crammed onto the couch beside Sapnap.

“We cleaned it earlier,” Alex says conspiratorially when he notices Dream marvelling at the surfaces.

“Aww, just for us?” George’s head is supported by Dream’s shoulder. It’s considerably distracting, especially as George’s fingers fiddle with the end of his shirt. He tries not to stare, but every time he manages to lift his head up, Dream finds his gaze falling again as though George has some kind of magnetic field surrounding him.

“Fuck off, no.”

George sighs. His fingers brush against Dream’s side, freezing against his skin. All of a sudden, it’s everything he can do to keep his breathing even, eyes closing so he doesn’t have to look down at George’s gentle features from this angle.

Dream straightens up when George touches a little too close to his stomach, tracking ice across his ribs with every scrape of skin against skin. George isn’t even aware of the effect he’s having, absently ghosting his hands over Dream’s hip. “Pass me another drink?” He’s far too sober for this shit, blood pulsing every time George gets too close and he can feel his breath against his neck.

*Are you sure that’s a good idea?* Sapnap’s eyebrow cocks, but he pops open the fridge regardless and hands the bottle to Dream. The cap clatters to the floor as he whacks the top against one of the counters, narrowly missing George’s face in its trajectory.

“You know what a bottle opener is, right?” He glares up at Dream.

He shrugs, tipping it against his lips so it slides easily across his tongue. His arms still ache from the performance, but Dream can feel his limbs slowly untensing. Condensation coats his palms within a few seconds, coldness reminiscent of George’s touch. Dream grips the bottle tighter. Recently, everything reminds him of George in some way or another, and he just wants it to end.

The bottle is half empty when he lowers it.

George looks quickly away from his throat and gestures towards the fridge. “Gimme one too.”

“Get it yourself,” Sapnap says, kicking his legs up to rest on a bemused Karl.

“*Sapnap*.” George tugs the syllable out into a whine.

“Nope, not gonna work on me.”

George’s hands leave Dream’s skin as he stands up to reach over to the fridge himself. He’s unsure if he’s relieved or not. The couch dips as George sits back down, this time with his hands clutching the bottle the way he holds everything, as though it’s about to shatter in his grasp. Dream absently wonders what their hands would look like, joined, before he shoves the thought back into the depths of his mind. At least his torment is done for now.

He takes the bottle as George wordlessly passes it to him, bashing this one against the counter too. Dream has a knack for this sort of thing. The cap pops off on the first try.

The alcohol is beginning to set in now, coaxing the rigidity out of his limbs bit by bit. Dream finds his mind clearing, white water calmed to a glassy surface still enough to display each individual ripple. His fingers stop twitching, replaying the notes from the concert against the tops of his thighs. Now, George’s presence doesn’t burn him so much.

Sapnap half heartedly tries to stop him when he swings the fridge open again, but he’s not entirely sober himself, so it’s difficult to care all that much.

There’s no table in this bus, only couches facing each other and a long counter stretching along one of the walls. Karl insists there used to be a fold out one, before someone had fallen onto it and snapped the thing in half. A makeshift recording studio is shoved in the back past the bunks, the sight of clunky laptops and tangled wires all too familiar to Dream.

At some point, Karl drags an empty crate into the space between the seats, upturns it so they have a surface to set their beers upon. The crate steadily fills up with teetering stacks of dimes and pennies as they begin a round of Texas hold ‘em, playful insults tossed back and forth whenever someone loses money. George blows through all the change in his pockets within the first ten minutes, so resorts to peering at Dream’s cards with a guarded expression.

“This is bull *shit*,” Sapnap protests as he’s forced to shove another stack of coins in Dream’s direction. “It’s rigged, I’m telling you.”

Dream shrugs, and it makes Sapnap’s lips press into a grim line. “It’s not my fault I’m better than you.”

“Maybe we should play snap or something, that’s more Sapnap’s level,” George teases. His head’s back on Dream’s shoulder, hair brushing against his neck every now and then.

If Sapnap wasn’t pissed before, he certainly is now. His knuckles crack as he sits up straighter, a glare levelled at George. “You lasted about two rounds.”

“I wasn’t trying.”

“Oh, I’m *sure*.”

They stare at each other with varying degrees of competitiveness. Dream knows George might not



care about winning, but he likes to fuck with Sapnap. “Dream,” George says, looking up at him from under his eyelashes. And damn it, Dream doesn’t want to admit it sticks his breath to the back of his throat. George gestures at Dream’s stack of dimes. “Can I have some of yours?”

“Uhuh,” he says intelligently.

George sweeps the coins over to his side of the crate and hands the cards to Dream. He automatically begins to cut the deck, flipping them back and forth with adeptive certainty. Once it’s shuffled, Dream lays the cards atop the crate in a neat stack. Sapnap and George lean forward to retrieve their cards, only glancing at them for a moment before sliding forward the starting bets.

Dream discards the top card from the deck, and flips the next three over. Sapnap’s eyebrows immediately raise, which makes George laugh under his breath. “Your poker face is terrible, you know. Yikes.”

“Oh, piss off,” Sapnap bites, in the overexaggerated brit accent he uses when George is being a bitch. “Wanker.”

Dream can only watch in horror as George raises anyway, seemingly oblivious to the way Sapnap keeps glancing down at his cards with the least subtlety he’s ever seen. He flips the fourth card.

The dimes scrape against the crate when Sapnap pushes his entire stack into the middle of the crate, staring George down as he mutters “all in.” Dream has to let his head drop into his hands, wondering if this is going to end with the two of them fighting with increasing pettiness. He can’t handle the unnecessary tension on the bus, honestly. Especially considering Dream’s current predicament regarding a certain bassist.

He bites his tongue as George puts the rest of his coins in. Dream manages to glimpse George’s hand as he leans back against the couch, and fights back the groan clawing up his throat as he takes in the matching queens. There’s already a queen on the crate, staring up at him with blank eyes. Futile though it may be, Dream prays Sapnap has something better, since he’s the one that actually cares about winning. If George loses, Dream knows he’ll stay mad for about two minutes before forgetting about it, in the characteristic way he so often does. He holds his breath as he flips the final card.

It’s the last fucking queen.

“Yes!” Sapnap throws his cards down, presenting a straight hand. He looks far too pleased with himself all things considered, smirking cockily at George.

“This is tragic,” George moans, bumping his head against Dream’s shoulder. A laugh tips out of him as he finishes, “for you,” and tosses his cards onto the crate.

It’s almost funny to watch how fast Sapnap’s smile melts off his face as he sees George’s hand, replaced by mild despair within a split second. His lips only tug further downwards as George scoops the entire pot towards him, pockets full of coins which jingle together as he tucks his legs back up to his chest. Alex and Karl seem to be holding back laughter, eyes flicking to Sapnap as they try to determine whether he’s actually mad. “Easy.”

“That was rigged, we shouldn’t have let *Dream* deal. Rematch, now.”

“Nuh-uh,” George shakes his head. “You’re broke.”

Sapnap bristles. “So were you!”

Dream decides to step in before they're at each other's throats. "Here," he says, tossing a beer from the fridge into Sapnap's hands in the hopes it'll placate him. It clinks against the ring wrapped around the base of his thumb. "George just got lucky. You know how he is with stuff like this, his odds must be--"

"Don't care," Sapnap says, pouting at his murky reflection in the brown glass.

It doesn't take him long to recover, unable to resist the pull of casual conversation as the dusk turns to true darkness. The crate is kicked out of the way, sent tumbling to the back of the bus with one sure-footed kick from Alex. He winces as it bashes against an amp, but doesn't get up to check the damage. Quiet music filters out on the overhead speakers, which crackle every now and again with radio static. As Dream drains another bottle, he feels the playing tension easing from his shoulders, limbs loose and content as he laughs easier and doesn't draw away from George's presence so much.

Karl makes George and Sapnap leave the bus to smoke, which Dream supposes is fair enough. He doesn't miss the stray elbows to the ribs on their way out. He has half a mind to yell a *behave* after them, but his tongue feels heavy and lethargic, too big for his mouth.

"Man, you have it *bad*," Alex says once it's just the three of them left.

Dream chews at a hangnail until his thumb smarts with pain. "Huh?"

Alex and Karl exchange a look. "You're like, in love with George or something."

White panic claws at his throat, forces the blood to pump around his body with increased urgency. It's one thing for Sapnap, his best friend of over a decade, to notice, but if Karl and Alex know too, Dream must be more obvious than he thought. His mind races as he thinks of all the times he's leaned towards George a little too much, stared at his soft hands a little too long.

"Woah, chill out," Karl says. Dream's vision refocuses to see them looking at him, eyes brimming with concern. "We don't have a problem with it or anything, if that's what you're worried about."

He drags a hand over his face. "Nah, you guys are chill, I know. It's just." Dream pauses. What exactly is it, anyway? Him and George are best friends, and he's sure this momentary *whatever* isn't going to stop that. "I'm not in love with him." Right? The ache which settles in the centre of his chest every time he pulls out his acoustic to play George's song seems to suggest otherwise.

"Real convincing, Dream."

"And even if I was," he continues, "it wouldn't matter, because George likes someone else." The words sound stupid as they come out, but Dream can't bring himself to care. He's beginning to feel a little better, the world around him slowly softening until it's hazy and intimate, colours more difficult to distinguish.

Karl and Alex fall silent at that. He doesn't blame them.

He doesn't miss the look they shoot at him when George waltzes back onto the bus, oblivious to the conversation that's just occurred. George takes his spot next to Dream, leaning against him as if it's the most natural thing in the world. And usually, he supposes, it would be. Usually, he wouldn't be sitting here overthinking everything, mind racing a thousand miles a minute whenever George's hands brush against him, or when he leans forward and Dream can see the freckle adorning the back of his neck.

Conversation becomes increasingly more difficult to grip hold of, and the words which slip away

turn into phrases and sentences until Dream isn't sure what they're talking about. His mind begins to drift, stuck in the web of endless lyrics and tabs he'll probably remember to the grave.

"Hey, you smell that?" Someone asks. Dream isn't paying enough attention to distinguish if it's Karl, Alex or Sapnap. He knows it's not George, his face pushed into his shoulder, unmoving. His hands are still, resting palms up between them. George looks weary after their earlier performance, energy crashing into nothing as it often does for a few hours after they've left the stage. The empty bottle rests on its side along with several others, a fairy ring of dented caps surrounding the collection.

"What, the barbecue?"

Sure enough, Dream catches what they're on about, the smell of charred meat drifting in through the door, which is propped open by an empty guitar case. It's accompanied by the chaotic drone of multiple conversations layered over each other. It sounds like half the bands on tour are in the parking lot, their voices bouncing off the sides of the busses. He groans, limbs too lethargic to propel himself off the couch. His muscles ache. "I'm so hungry. Can we grab some?"

The three of them look at each other for a second. "Sure, it's not a bad idea," Sapnap says, shoulders rising into an empty shrug before he swings his legs off Alex and Karl. He's pulling more drinks from the fridge, cradling them precariously in his arms.

Dream swipes a few. "You're underage," he says, motioning with his head so George grabs the rest.

"Literally when have you ever cared?" Sapnap's arms cross over his chest. "You turned 21 and became so boring, swear to god."

"Whatever," Dream shoots over his shoulder as he steps out of the bus, footing more unsure than usual. Smoke winds out from somewhere over the other side of the parking lot, drifting into the narrow gaps between stationary vehicles and clouding his vision. He can hear music, being played on a banged up stereo straight from the 80s by the sounds of it. The thing rattles with the higher frequencies, speakers threatening to give out with every bass hit.

It doesn't take them long to find the barbecue, surrounded by a pack of ravenous band members. Some of them gawk a little at Dream, and he's not sure why until he remembers he's not wearing his mask for once. The open air is pleasant against his skin, and it's nice to see everything unobscured. He nudges George gently. "You're a dead giveaway, you know that?" Everyone's used to seeing George practically stuck to his side.

George rolls his eyes so hard Dream is surprised it doesn't hurt. "Yeah, because they're not gonna know who the tall blond guy is. Right."

Once they've successfully acquired food, the five of them end up in yet another band's bus, this one entirely unfamiliar to Dream. There's a PS2 in this one, which seems to be the main attraction. Like flies to an open honey jar. While Sapnap's busy mashing a controller with fiery competitiveness, Dream sits on the steps and tracks his eyes over the twilight. Palm trees rustle in the breeze. In the distance, he can hear the highway, and bile scorches the back of his throat as he thinks about the bus, pulling away into the night in just a few hours.

He lifts another bottle (he's lost count at this point) to his lips, but he's stopped by cold hands taking hold of his. "Dream, stop."

Dream fights back a delirious sob. "I'm fine," he whines, reaching for the bottle.

George's eyes soften into chocolate tones rather than unyielding earth. "It's empty." His words come out as a whisper, so gentle it hurts. The glass rattles as he sets it down on the concrete with one fluid motion.

"Oh." He slumps against the door, knee bouncing erratically. "Gimme another one."

George laughs, and the cigarette between his lips nearly slips free. There's a flicker behind his hand as he lights it, before the orange glow fades from his chin and his face isn't illuminated anymore. Dream thinks it's safer this way, when he can't see the pretty radiance dancing over his cheeks. "Do you really think that's a good idea?" His words are muffled.

"Yeah." His eyebrows furrow in confusion. Otherwise, why would he ask?

Smoke trails from George's lips as he exhales, and disperses into the night. Dream tries his best not to stare, he really does, but it's difficult when George looks like *this* and his brain is addled with alcohol. The sound of game music and conflicting conversation fades into white noise until even George's inhalations seem loud. "Why don't you get it yourself?"

He doesn't like the way George is smirking at him with poorly masked amusement. "Fine."

But when he pushes himself to his feet, his head spins in a whirl of colour and disorientation. It's as if his surroundings are conjured from greasy oil pastel, and some (dickhead) omniscient being is smearing their thumb across the lines. Blending the colours into nonsense. Dream tries to focus on the route to the fridge, but his mind diverts to George, sitting on the steps with a hand over his mouth as he tries not to laugh. George, drowning in one of Dream's hoodies he must've stolen from the bunk full of shit. George, pretty lips clasped languidly around a lit cigarette. Fuckfuckfuck-

He sits down.

"That's what I thought," George comments. His hand finds its way to Dream's knee so it stops jerking.

His eyes prickle at the sight of it, pale skin settled against his dark jeans like it belongs there. Dream never wants to leave this moment, just him and George sitting on the steps of a stranger's bus with smoke blurring the lines between them and whisking his mind into pure delirium. He doesn't notice the wetness veiling his cheeks until George says "oh, Clay," his thumbs reaching up to swipe at the tears.

If George knew why he was crying, would he have an arm slung over Dream's shoulders?

"I'm fine," he says, lifting the bottom of his shirt to dry his eyes. His stomach is exposed for a moment, before he drops the material and blinks to clear the rest.

"I know, it's the alcohol," George reassures. He's rubbing small circles into Dream's upper arm, his breath hot against the shell of his ear. *If only you knew.*

"Dream," George's face appears right in front of him. He wonders how long he's been zoned out for. "I'm gonna grab Sapnap one second, you'll be okay here?"

He wonders what Sapnap'll make of this. His stomach turns as he nods. George disappears into the bus, thick soled trainers darting up the steps in a flash of white, laces trailing behind him, ready to send him face first to the floor. But somehow, George never falls.

Dream lasts about five seconds before he's stumbling forward, tipping out of the bus as nausea grips him with both viscous hands. He doesn't really register much as he's sick onto the asphalt, but the taste of bile remains as he pushes his forehead against the side of the bus. The metal is cool now, doesn't burn him like it would during the day. An unfamiliar voice asks if he's alright, but he waves its owner off with as much strength as he can summon. Breathing stings, makes his eyes water all over again as he draws in deep breaths of night air. Worst of all, he can still smell George, taste the smoke over the acid scorching his tongue.

"You're fucked up, dude." Sapnap's hands bracket his shoulders as he pulls Dream away from the bus. He exhales with bittersweet understanding as he takes in the state of him.

"Nah, 'm fine," he says, even as nausea roils over him again.

George is there to hold him this time, hand rubbing between his shoulder blades. Sapnap pushes his hair from his eyes, hands too hot against his forehead. Stars dance across his vision every time he squeezes his eyes shut, whorls of needling brightness interrupting his peace. "All done?" George's voice draws him out of the styxian pit, back up to the half desolate parking lot. An empty coke can rattles past them, pushed by wind phantoms and evening wraiths.

He wipes at his mouth with the back of his hand, saliva stringing between the two. "Yeah, done."

Sapnap and George walk close on either side of him as they pick their way across the lot. The floodlights don't spin as much anymore, and it doesn't hurt to breathe. Dream only registers getting back onto the bus because he has to, carefully pushed through the motions by George and Sapnap.

George sits by his bunk again, a bowl settled in his lap just in case. He pushes Dream's hair out of his face, tucking the strands behind his ear with featherlight touch. Behind him, Sapnap pulls himself into the bed above George's, whispering a soft goodnight before tugging the curtains across the opening and consequently vanishing from sight.

Dream shoves his face into the pillow since George isn't letting him sleep on his back, and mouths the words he's been too scared to utter, over and over in the hopes it'll make it fiction.

*Think I might love you*

"You look like shit."

Dream glares at Sapnap before remembering his eyes aren't visible from behind his shades. Usually he'd push them back onto his forehead to get the point across, but Dream thinks if he's exposed to any more light he might actually barbecue his corneas. "That's considerate of you."

Sapnap laughs at how scratchy Dream's voice is. "Dude, are you gonna be able to perform later?"

The cap of his water falls into his palm. It's soothing against his throat, washes away the soreness for a few moments before the ache returns. No matter how much he drinks, Dream can't rid the foul taste from under his tongue. "Yeah, I'll be fine," he lies. Just thinking about the speaker stacks and stage lights makes him want to cry, curl up against the wall in his bunk and hope he'll be forgotten about.

Sapnap's expression morphs into something more serious. His brows pull down over his eyes, and his lips lose the impish quirk he's been exhibiting ever since Dream had shown up with sunglasses and his designated hangover shirt. "You can't be doing this."

"I just got drunk, no big deal." Dream stretches his legs out, feels the stiffness ebbing from his joints.

"I think we both know *why* you did, and that's the worrying part. Sure, you got drunk this time, I can deal with that. But what are you gonna do next time?"

He exhales sharply, pinching the bridge of his nose. "There's not going to be a *next time*. You know I'm not going to do anything dumb, I'm not an idiot. And stop looking at me like that, like I'm talking shit," he says.

They stare at each other, at an impasse. Neither of them want to be the one to break it.

Dream tosses his shades onto the table, already resisting the urge to snap his eyes shut as he adjusts to the light. The blind shuffles as Sapnap wordlessly lowers it, shutting the sun out so it's a little more bearable. His shirt is stretched out in all the right places, and the material's been washed so many times Dream barely feels it against his skin. It smells like home, of sunscreen and oranges and strawberry — "I hate this," Dream breathes.

He's forced to continue when Sapnap remains silent, patient. "I—" his tongue feels like sandpaper. "I'm completely gone. It hurts."

"That was fast."

Dream smiles, although it doesn't reach his eyes. "I think...I think it's been there for a long time." He remembers the mattress on the floor, a bass too big for its owner, a laptop full of seclusive thoughts and knotted shoelaces. "And it would've been okay, if not for the song, and now everything's not okay."

"What are you going to do about it?"

Dream looks up at him, and he's sure there must be some wicked bags under his eyes. "He's my best friend. I'll get over it, eventually. Might take weeks, months, but I'll get over it."

The next city passes in a blur, melted into an incomprehensible mess by the relentless sun as July matures. They're on the road again, bus trundling through the night towards another place he'll only see a fraction of before it's time to leave.

Dream lies there in the dark, sheets tangled haphazardly around his ankles as he stares into the abyss. He's edging towards the threshold of sleep, but it seems the closer he gets, the steeper the incline becomes, until white static flies across his vision and hisses in his ears without end. It feels as though there's thorns filling his head, scratching against delicate membranes until he's forced to squeeze his eyes shut in order to keep it at bay.

It stings when he grips at his hair, tugging the roots in the kind of frustration that feels like a relentless itch. The sort that drills down to his very bones, electrifying every nerve ending in the worst possible way. He disrupts the silence as he sighs, hands falling back down to rest on the lumpy mattress.

"Dream?" It's quiet enough that he almost loses it in the raging sea of white noise tipping about in his head.

There's a rustling sound from across the bus as the owner of the voice sits up. His joints click as a result of the shitty mattresses they each have, lumpy in all the worst places to poke uncomfortably at their weary bodies. "I know you're awake."

Dream's eyes widen in surprise, although he figures it's not all that shocking. He flicks through the plethora of memories he has of George knowing exactly what's going on in his head, only glances and gentle nudges needed for them to communicate in a rudimentary sort of way. And doesn't get very far, because he realises it happens every day. The corners of his lips tip upwards and he wonders when words stopped being a necessity between them.

"Yes," he says at last, the word feverish. Dream can't see the time from within his bunk, but he imagines the red numbers are ticking later and later into the morning, beckoning sunrise and taunting him with their matter of fact simplicity.

There's no reply for a few moments. It comes in the form of the curtains around Dream's bunk being tugged back, George's face, illuminated by the emergency lighting, appearing like a beacon in the dark. He looks different in the lowlight, all his sharp edges reduced to nothing as though Dream's blended out pencil lead with frantic fingers. His heart begins to thud against his ribcage, traitorous. But then it's gone, the mattress dipping as George lies down next to him and the curtain falls shut once again, leaving them in a veil of darkness.

Dream thinks perhaps it's easier that way.

"What are you doing?" He whispers, noticeably belated. Their skin sticks together where it touches, and he tries his best not to cringe as the heat prickles at his back. This proximity makes his throat burn, but he instinctively pulls closer.

George shrugs. "I couldn't sleep either. And usually I wouldn't care, but just this once, I wanted to," he says, voice honeyed by the early hour.

"And what makes you think this'll help?" Dream asks incredulously. He's reminded of mattresses on the floor, moth-eaten couches, apartments with the doors hanging off the hinges and water leaking through the ceiling.

The silence that follows stretches out for so long Dream begins to suspect George has fallen asleep. His arm starts to sting where it's slung over George's hip, the unnatural position causing pins and needles to prod at his forearm.

When he moves to pull it away, he's stopped by George's hand gripping his own. Something in his mind short circuits, and he's left there in the dark with his lips slightly parted, palms clammy as George slowly cradles his hand against his chest. He can feel the callouses on George's fingers from pulling tirelessly at guitar strings, knows his skin is torn in all the same places. His throat closes up on itself, heart woozy against the confines of his irritated ribs. It takes every scrap of him to remember he can't have this, to remember he's his best friend and George doesn't deserve to have it fucked up.

"You help," George breathes, delicate as butterfly wings. It's rare, to hear his voice bare like this, stripped of its usual sarcastic undertone and left just for Dream in 4am delirium. Dream thinks he might be addicted. "Somehow, you always do."

For the first time in a while, Dream feels well rested. He hums to himself as he pours coffee into styrofoam cups because they don't have any clean ones left, almost tipping boiling water all over his hands when George emerges from his bunk with an amicable smile on his face.

"You're in a good mood," he comments, reaching out to swipe one of the cups. He winces as it burns the roof of his mouth, face screwing up.

"Serves you right, that was for Sapnap."

George continues to sip at it anyway. "You love me more, just make him another." He shrugs, sits on the couch with his knees against his chest like he always does. Dream can't find it within himself to reprimand him any more than that, and sets about making a third coffee.

"Are you guys excited?" Sapnap steps back onto the bus, Dream's shades perched at the end of his nose. He looks dumb, staring over the top of them so his eyebrow bar remains visible.

"Why?" George doesn't look up from his phone, thumbs pressing rapidly at the buttons as he composes a text to someone. Dream briefly wonders who it is, before he pushes the train of thought out of his mind so it can't hurt him. He feels oddly buoyant, he doesn't want to ruin it.

Sapnap looks outraged. "It's the fourth, you dumbass."

George's face remains unimpressed. He snaps his phone shut and it clatters to the table, blue dolphin charm following to rest next to it. "Okay...?"

"You're literally so annoying," Sapnap bites. "Anyway, remember we're on earlier today because of the fireworks."

Dream tunes them out as they begin to bicker again, smile reflected back up at him from the dark surface of his coffee. It's unpleasantly hot against his lips, bitter as it washes over his tongue. As he sets his cup down, Dream catches sight of his acoustic leaning precariously against the couch next to George's feet. It reminds him of sleepless nights, frets against his tender fingers, lyrics hummed for only the two of them to hear. And all at once, an idea begins to form in his mind, blossoming outwards with slurred lines and someone else's words.

"Dream, get ready," Sapnap's voice pulls him out of his reverie.

The pair of them are fighting over the mirror, each armed with an eye pencil. It seems like a bad idea to him, if the way they're elbowing each other is anything to go by. Warmth floods over him as he watches them, even if they're narrowly avoiding poking themselves in the eye with every jostle and gentle shove.

"Dream!" George is turned to look at him, the liner held midway to his face. "Sapnap said get ready."

He holds his hands up. "Alright, alright. I'm doing it now."



It's nice, playing before the sun starts to set. Everything seems golden, looked upon by the sympathetic gaze of the sun. Dream thought the heat would annoy him, but he powers through the set paying little mind to the sweat dripping down his back and from his hairline. He almost feels regret, as the songs slip away from him one after another, blurring into an amber haze of warmth and familiar chords. As they're drawing towards the end of the setlist, Dream decides fuck it, he hasn't let himself take nearly enough risk recently.

"There's a song I want to play," Dream says into the mic, and he can feel George's gaze burning against his back. His neck is rubbed red and raw as the guitar strap begins to bite into his mild sunburn, irritable nylon painful against his tender skin. He knows this isn't a good idea, yet his words trip away from him without his express permission. "None of you have heard it yet."

He imagines the crowd tenses with curiosity, but in reality he's doubtful how many of them can actually digest his words right now. The heat haze seems to be working its magic, addling minds with humidity and mirage until it's an effort to stay on his feet without feeling dizzy. Countless people have already passed out against the front barrier, pulled free by security with ragdoll limbs and hair plastered to foreheads.

Dream turns to stage left and finds exactly what he expects.

George's arms fall free of his bass to reach upwards, adjust the goggles which sit atop his head. Dream thinks they look stupid. George thinks his mask is stupid. They've reached an impasse. *Can I?* he mouths. He's not sure what he's going to do if George says no.

But then George is nodding, dark eyes filling up with pure trust as he allows Dream to do this. Pale fingers reach with heartbreaking precision for the tuning pegs, dropping the bottom string so it's pitched down a step. Dream can feel fireworks bubbling up his throat, inflating his tongue until he's not even sure he can sing without the words coming out intoxicated anymore. He knows Sapnap is looking at him from the back of the stage, an eyebrow raised in disbelief as he watches Dream run towards the very thing that's kept him up the last few days. It doesn't matter — he's doing this as George's best friend.

Dream takes a deep breath, and the first few chords set light to the air around him.

*Hello, I've waited here for you...*

He'd be lying if he said the words don't sting as they come out. Dream feels his eyes slip closed and he's plunged into red darkness, only his hands on his guitar and the smell of dusky smoke to remind him he's standing on stage at all. The chords are deep in his muscle memory now, a result of hours and hours over the last few days playing George's song until his fingers split open and his mouth tasted of blood. Every atom of him aches.

George starts playing at some point, a bassline Dream wasn't even aware existed, most likely hidden away in the recesses of his hard drive. Sapnap seems to take the hint and begins improvising something, powering the sound with energy so it feels more tangible. He's used to the song sounding softer than this, quietly strummed on a lonely acoustic in the dead of night. It sounds so different now, closer to the way his heart had pounded with horror when he'd first seen it. More like split fingers and tears washing into gas station plugholes. Somehow, he can see this song being played on bigger stages than this, one day.

It's bittersweet, as he places himself behind the lyrics like a marionette, puppeteer blissfully unaware of how tight the jagged strings around Dream's wrists are. He belatedly realises he could

see himself writing these very same lyrics about George in another timeline, and the epiphany has his voice faltering as he tilts towards the end of the song.

And the lyrics don't stop.

*If everything could ever feel this real forever,*

Dream feels a presence beside him, an uncertain voice flowing out over the mic to pick up where he left off. He wrenches his eyes open even though it stings to look at George as he sings the last few lines. Stage lights make his face glow with pale gold. His voice wobbles, his hands shake on his strings, a result of the hundreds of eyes turned upon him.

"Keep going," Dream murmurs next to his ear, too quiet for the mic to pick up.

George's voice grows more certain after that, chest swelling as Dream trains his eyes on him. He's looking away from the crowd as he sings the last line, the hundreds of faces forgotten so he can beam at the one which matters most. Dream mouths it right along with him, lips trembling.

*You've got to promise not to stop when I say when*

When it's over and the notes evaporate into silence, Dream feels a peaceful wave of acceptance crash over him, even as he watches George retreat back to stage left. The noise from the crowd fills his head, cramming his melancholy down into a tiny corner where he can begin to ignore it. Even if he can't sing like that for George, they're *best fucking friends*, and he can learn to be happy with that.

Even if it hurts.

"Dream!"

He's barely set his guitar down backstage when George's arms fly around him, hair brushing against the bottom of Dream's chin. The goggles dig into his neck, knocked skewish. "Holy shit," he whispers. "I'm still shaking," he says, pulling away and holding his hands out so Dream can see how wobbly his fingers are. The black paint is chipped, pink nail beds revealed in the places it's come loose.

His mind seems to be on autopilot again as he takes George's hands in his own, clutching tight so he doesn't shake anymore. His treacherous, disobedient mind. "You should sing the last choruses on the recording, maybe. With me." Dream thinks the sound of their voices together will be his undoing.

"Yeah?"

George looks up at him with stars in his eyes and a smile stretching across his face. His bass is still slung across his shoulders, twisted around so the navy body rests against his back. The strap crosses over his chest, a union jack stitched onto the nylon.

"Of course," Dream says genuinely. He pulls George back against his chest, holding him close so his shoulders stop quivering. "You did great," and he finds the words aren't difficult to say in the slightest.

“Do we really have to?” George asks, eyeliner smudged beyond repair across his bottom eyelids. Somehow there’s glitter stuck to his cheekbones, and stray pieces of snow coloured confetti are tangled in his dark hair. Dream is sure he’s in a similar state, with sweat running into his eyes from his hairline and stage makeup several inches away from where it should be.

They’re sat in the bus, alone, shifting around under the dim lighting in contrasting states of undress. The pair of them are exhausted, but excitement still worms its way into Dream’s chest as he hears the crowd of people outside. Crew members and familiar bands populate the area close to where the buses are, expectant eyes trained skywards.

He rolls his eyes at George’s petulant tone. “Yes, George. It’s the fourth of July!” His vision is temporarily compromised as Dream pulls a clean shirt over his head.

“And I care because...?”

Dream looks up from his mask, now cradled in his outstretched palms. Even when they’re not performing, he prefers to wear it in public these days now they’re gaining popularity. George has his feet tucked up onto the couch, bare toes wiggling absentmindedly. Dream’s lips press together sharply in endearment as he’s reminded of the other wondrous conveniences of wearing the mask offstage.

In a practiced motion, he fastens it to cover his face once more. “Come on,” he says, reaching up to grab at George’s hands and tug him from his sitting position. The noise of disgruntlement George releases is something he’d imagine a cat making when disturbed from sixteen straight hours of sleep. He tries to ignore the coolness of George’s palms against his own. It’s futile. “It’ll be fun! And Sappap’s already out there.”

“Is that supposed to make me wanna go? Poor attempt at persuasion.”

Dream steps closer so their faces are inches apart and wow, he’s fucking grateful for the mask right now. George’s eyes glint in the way they often do when he’s offstage, serious facade cast away easily as spidersilk to reveal the part of him only Dream and Sappap know how to see. “I didn’t think that one through,” Dream admits. “But for me? Please?”

There’s a moment he thinks George will say no, will say he’s too tired after the past few days of performance after performance. He can feel it too, the burning of muscles, the heaviness of his eyelids and the welts forming upon his fingertips despite the layers of hardened skin he’s built up. Dream is exhausted too. But then George’s lips are tipping up, up, up, parting to stretch gently across his teeth. “Okay. For you.”

“You took your time,” Sappap says once he sees them. A familiar smile begins to spread over his face and Dream feels his stomach sink. “What were you doing in there?”

George beats Dream to answering; “having sex.” His tone is perfectly deadpan, all emotion vacant from his expression.

Sappap blinks as George takes the bait. Yeah, Dream thinks. He’s not used to being beaten at his own game. “What the fuck- you know what, I don’t even care anymore.” Sappap waves them off, lifting the bottle dangling from his fingers up to his lips to drain its contents. Suddenly, the red tint

covering his cheeks makes a little more sense. Dream vacantly wonders where he'd got it from, considering Sapnap is very underage, and their fridge is markedly empty.

Before he can ask, Sapnap's turning back towards one of the other bands milling about on the grass, although Dream suspects the area they're standing on has been reduced to little more than trampled mud and dirt. He can feel his toes sinking into it. No doubt the white band encompassing his shoes is going to be mudstained by morning, clumps of dirt sticking to the soles and tracked over the laces.

"I would say that worked pretty well," George says as Sapnap moves out of earshot.

Dream feels worryingly warm under the mask, and he's beginning to think it's not because of the July heat. "He's not sober, he doesn't know you're kidding," he protests, although his voice comes out all wrong and shaky. He swallows thickly, hoping George doesn't notice. Just as surely as the Earth orbits the sun, Dream doesn't crumble because of his bandmates.

"Dream. Do you really think he cares enough to remember?"

He doesn't think about how his name sounds coming out of George's mouth, especially when his eyes are dark looking up through the cover of night. Admittedly, George has a point. Sapnap might be his best friend, but that just makes it easier for him to torment Dream, particularly where George is concerned. "I- I guess so."

Before Dream can get down on his knees and start praying for the ground to swallow him up, George exclaims, "ooh, it's starting!" He sounds far too excited for someone who wanted to spend the evening in the bus, but Dream isn't going to be the one to point it out. The picture of excitement all over George's face makes his chest squeeze.

They sit on the ground as a hush falls over the area, a small distance away from everyone else so they can talk without being overheard. Their shoulders bump together due to their proximity. He can smell gum, saccharine and cloying. Dream knows he's going to have mud plastered to his ass when he stands up, but as his knees knock against George's, he can't bring himself to care. Jeans can be replaced.

The fireworks aren't particularly special, considering someone's manager probably bought whatever was on clearance, last minute and disorganised. As things tend to be on the road. He can see the odd sparkler being waved around precariously close to other people's eyes. Still, Dream can't stop grinning as the pathetic display of sparking light illuminates the sky with red and gold. The back of their hands brush, stinging with static, and George doesn't pull away.

As George cranes his neck to look towards the sky, Dream finds his gaze slipping over to look at him for a split second. There's definitely glitter on his face, illuminated by the dim starlight so his cheekbones sparkle when he tilts his head. The traitorous iron fingers tug at Dream's heart with constricting grip.

"Dream?"

George is looking straight at him, eyes clouded with tempests Dream can't even begin to decode. Somehow, he doesn't have it in him to panic, even though he's been caught for real this time. His lips fumble to excuse himself, but no sound comes out. Thick cigarette smoke floods around them until it's difficult to breathe right. "George," he murmurs. The starlight flowing over George's cheeks is replaced by the flickering impressions of fireworks neither of them are looking at, red and gold and silver clear against his pale skin.

“All this time...you’re an idiot,” George says, stunning Dream into momentary silence.

Cold fingers brush against his jaw as George pushes the mask upwards, too fast for Dream to catch his wrist and stop him. It drifts to rest on the ground, stark white against the mud and trampled grass. In the back of his mind he wonders how wide his eyes are right now, how obvious the expression on the face is to George, who always seems to know what he’s thinking. Dirt creeps up under his fingernails as he steadies himself against the ground. “Why’d you do that?”

“It’s in the way.”

“In the-”

Dream is silenced by cold lips pressing against his own. He just about has the agency to close his eyes even as they fly wide, shutting out the fireworks and floodlights dimly illuminating the field. There are fingers in his hair, ghosting over his cheeks, jaw, settling on his shoulders. George tastes like smoke and artificial sweetness, the juxtaposition somehow perfectly sensical. Confusion wells up in his chest, but he shoves it down, just letting himself have this and wrap his arms around George. His frame is perfect to hold, easy to wrap his arms around and pull George closer so it feels like he never has to let go.

He’s forced to pull away eventually, lungs burning with a dull ache. His chest heaves, what little oxygen he has left quickly flooding to his brain. “What,” he says eloquently, blinking as though George will disappear in a cloud of mirage and he’ll wake up alone in his bunk with only a pillow for company. “Did Nick tell you?” Dream blurts out, phantom fireworks ricocheting around the cavity of his chest. “I thought-”

George laughs, eyes slipping shut for a brief moment. “You think you’re *so* subtle. As if you’re not Captain Obvious. I was waiting for you to do something, stupid.” Then he’s leaning back up for another kiss, this one slower, more practiced than the last. It feels as though Dream’s swallowed a jar of lightning bugs, flickering with brilliance as they flutter against his bones and tangle his nerves into addictive chaos.

“You knew,” he moans. Dream isn’t sure how he resists the urge to cover his face as he thinks about all the dumb, lovesick shit he’s done recently, all the guilty stares and subtle gazes. All of which George noticed, apparently. “How long did you know?”

“No doubt longer than you knew,” George rolls his eyes so all the honey tones glint up at Dream. “And who do you think the song’s for, you dense fuck? I’ve been waiting for it to click this whole time.”

The bubble of confusion bursts into awe, embers singeing the delicate lining of his chest. “For *me*?” He’s certain his eyes are huge, but he doesn’t have the spare mental capacity to stop himself from gawking at George.

“Clay, it amazes me how blind you are. No wonder Sapnap’s been particularly irritable lately, if this is what he’s had to deal with.”

His hand comes up to rest against his front, holding his heart firmly in place because it feels as though it’s about to thrum into absolute stillness. And everything he’d chalked up to George being his ‘best friend’ finally makes sense in one fell swoop. “Fuck, George. You could’ve just told me who the damn song was for and saved me a lot of heartache.”

“Well. We have the rest of the tour to make up for it.”

The fireworks are beginning to diminish now, the interludes between each flash and shower of sparks growing longer. George seems to notice and retrieves Dream's mask from the floor, cradling it gently in his hands before he presses it against Dream's face and fastens the clasps with soft fingers. It's enough to shift Dream's breathing back into an irregular cadence. Lastly, George kisses the glossy plane of the mask, right between where the eyes are dotted.

"You're such an idiot."

It's as though all the planets align when George smiles up at him, lips curved wider than he's ever seen them. Dream thinks he could write lines, verses, songs about this. "I hate you too, idiot."

"Holy *fuck*."

If there's one thing Dream can't stand, it's waking up to the sound of Sapnap shouting. He cracks an eye open, and sure (unfortunately) enough, he hadn't imagined his best friend hunched over and staring into the bunk, the curtains useless in Sapnap's fist. "Too bright," Dream moans, reaching out with all the coordination of a newborn to swipe at his wrist. He misses.

"Holy fuck."

Dream decides to indulge him. "*What?*"

"The fuck do you mean, 'what?'" Sapnap's eyes dart downwards to Dream's torso, skin exposed since the sheets are tangled around his waist. His mind still lags for a few seconds as he stares down at George's face where it pushes against his chest.

"Oh," he says.

George's breathing is evenly spaced, shoulders rising and falling in intoxicating repetition. His hair sticks up in several directions, the dark strands in direct contrast with the white sheets. Dream finds his fingers running absentmindedly through it, blunt nails scratching against his scalp with featherweight gentleness. He can still see the impressions of fireworks against the darkness when he slips his eyes closed. The bunk smells horrendous, a familiar concoction of dried sweat and cigarette smoke and flavoured alcohol sticking to the roof of his mouth unpleasantly in the mornings. It's better when he sticks his nose into George's hair, soft against his irritated skin. Strawberry scented conditioner takes root in his mind.

Sapnap sighs in exasperation. "Did you seriously just forget I'm standing here?" Dream flicks his eyes up to see Sapnap glaring at him.

"I'll spill later," Dream says. Fortunately, it seems to placate Sapnap, who drops the curtain with a huff which suggests he's some level of displeased. Whatever. Dream can't give less of a shit right now. The curtain falls back into place, dispelling the offensive amounts of light assaulting his bleary eyes.

George exhales in amusement against Dream's chest. It tickles. "You're awake?"

"Mmmm," George hums, but his eyes remain stubbornly closed.

“Woah, before 3 p.m, I’m impressed.”

George’s eyes blink open at that, brows drawn into a tight V shape. Dream resists the urge to smooth out the wrinkles for about two seconds before he remembers they’d spent a good portion of the previous night making out until George had passed out on his chest. He can have this. His thumb rubs circles into George’s forehead until it unpinches. There’s sleeping sand clinging to the corners of his eyes, remnants of eyeliner smudged all over his waterline, and a piece of star confetti plastered to his exposed collarbone. He looks perfect.

Dream leans forward to kiss him, all morning breath and tired limbs with sleep imprints criss crossing over their bodies. It doesn’t matter, he thinks as George smiles into the kiss, infectious. His head flops back onto the pillow and he spends a few moments grinning up at the top of the bunk like an idiot, cheeks stinging from the intensity of it.

“Fuck a song, I could write an album about this,” Dream says, fingers itching for his notepad full to the brim with half formed thoughts, dazzling kerosene detonations and acidic brimstone scraped from the recesses of his mind and spun into words.

George is playing with his fingers now, skin whispering like the rustling of pages. “About what?” As though he doesn’t know.

“You.”

George pushes himself up onto his elbows, palms framing his face. He seems to notice Dream’s urgency, his lips pulling downwards into a pout. “Can’t it wait ten minutes?” He pleads, eyes widening in the way he knows Dream can’t resist. Once, he’d thought George had his wrists ensnared with barbed wire, but he only feels the brush of gossamer against his pulse points.

Still, he can at least pretend like he’s not fighting a losing battle. “I don’t know, what would you rather I was doing?” He crosses his arms over his chest as though it’ll alleviate some of the ache which comes from mattress springs sticking into them all night.

“Something like this,” and Dream doesn’t even get the chance to open his eyes before George is kissing him again, the lazy slide of their tongues dreamlike in itself. The weight of George on his chest is enough to make him relax into the lumpy mattress. His limbs feel oddly disjointed, miles and miles away from where his mind soars independent of his body.

As George giggles slightly, Dream decides the rest of the album, Sapnap, and everything else can wait.

## Chapter End Notes

hi i'm here from the future to tell you i can provide the [playlist](#) for this fic now, everlong is first on here of course and everything else is probably a little more relevant to the actual fic setting LMAOOO

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